

Birmingham City University

Annual Research Integrity Statement 2019-20

1. Introduction

Birmingham City University (BCU) is committed to adhering to the principles set out in the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity (*The Concordat*) and strives to incorporate these into our everyday research culture. The University is currently working hard to increase research capacity and capability, with increased numbers of academic staff undertaking research, growth of our doctoral research student community and enhancement of professional services support for research activities through investment in the central Research Office Team.

The Concordat requires that the University should present a short annual statement to its governing body and subsequently make this publicly available. The annual statement should include:

- a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues;
- a statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
- a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, which will include data on the number of investigations. If no formal investigation has been undertaken, this should also be noted;
- a statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring; and,
- a statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

This Annual Research Integrity Statement summarises the actions and activities undertaken during the 2019/2020 academic year to strengthen research integrity at BCU. It provides assurances that measures are being taken to ensure the highest standards of research integrity at the University, along with improving accountability by making this statement publicly available via the University's website.

2. Actions and activities

2.1 Employment of Research Integrity Officers

- On 1st October 2019, two Research Integrity Officers began employment at the University within the central Research Office team. These new roles provide cross-University support and guidance on all matters of research integrity and support the work of University's Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance Committee (REGCC). The remit of these posts includes: reviewing and updating existing policies relating to research integrity and writing new policies where appropriate; providing guidance and support to researchers; and working to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is in place to support research activities, in accordance with relevant laws and professional norms.

- The Research Integrity Officers have embedded themselves within the University, building relationships with key contacts in each of the four Faculties and making connections with a number of other teams in the University related to research integrity, including the Library, Legal Services and IT Services.

2.2 Policy development

- The University's **Guidelines and Procedures for Good Research Practice and Misconduct** have been extensively revised and renamed the **Code of Good Research Conduct**. These changes were approved by the Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance Committee (REGCC) and signed off by Professor Julian Beer, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research in July 2020.
- A new **Research Misconduct Policy** was developed to integrate the previously separate processes for investigating research misconduct by staff and by students, and to ensure these processes align with the principles of the Concordat. This new policy was approved by the Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance Committee and signed off by Professor Julian Beer, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research in July 2020.
- The Research Ethics Officers are in the process of reviewing the University's Ethical Framework for Research, under the guidance of REGCC, which will be updated and approved in the coming academic year.

2.3 Training and awareness raising

- The Doctoral Research College provides new doctoral students with a programme of training as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice, including sessions specifically on research integrity and ethics. The Research Integrity Officers have contributed to these sessions within the Health, Education and Life Sciences (HELS).
- The Research Ethics Officers continued regular training for researchers and students on the use of the Ethical Review Manager (ERM) platform for submission of ethics applications, as well as continually updating guidance on Faculty-specific pages on iCity (the BCU intranet).
- New members of Faculty Academic Ethics Committees (FAEC) receive training from existing committee members, the Chair and the Research Ethics Officers.
- The Research Integrity Officers have delivered short introductory sessions about research integrity to staff and students across the University.
- The Research Integrity Officers led and reported on a cross-university trial of a commercial online Research Integrity training tool. The findings will be considered by the University's Research Committee in October, with a view to adoption in academic year 20-21.
- A new Research Integrity iCity (intranet) page was developed, which is accessible to staff and students of the University. This page is used to explain the key tenets of research integrity, while also acting as a central repository for relevant policies and resources.
- The University has updated its external website to include new research integrity and research ethics webpages. The research integrity page includes the University's statement on its commitment to the Concordat, relevant institutional research integrity contacts and links to key University policies.

3. Planned future activities

In addition to the activities conducted during the 2019/2020 academic year, there are several activities relating to research integrity planned for the forthcoming year, including:

1. The implementation of University-wide online research integrity training
2. The development of a Sensitive Research Policy
3. The development of new guidance and policies on authorship and publication by staff and students.
4. Full cross-university implementation of the Ethics Review Manager (ERM) platform for all research carried out by staff and postgraduate research students.
5. Annual review of the Research Misconduct Policy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.
6. Annual review of standard operating procedures related to research data collection, storage and destruction.

4. Impact of Covid-19

BCU has worked to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on research activities in the following ways:

- Covid-19 security of all BCU sites is reviewed constantly by the University Executive Group, taking account of local and national guidance. Guidance for staff and students is updated regularly via the University's internet newsletter, Tiger Today, through our iCity intranet and, where needed, through personalised email communications to our staff and students.
- The Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for Research chairs the Semester 1 Planning sub-group for Research, which has defined a priority needs-based three-tier approach for approval of access to campus for staff conducting research and postgraduate research students. Only researchers with a Priority-1 need are being granted campus access during the first phase of Semester 1 20-21.
- Researchers who can continue to work off campus are continuing to do so. Campus access is granted through application to and approval by the relevant Faculty Research Committee (FRC) or Faculty Research Degrees and Environment Committee (FRDEC), completion of Campus Access Request forms approved by faculty Executive Deans and mandatory online training in Covid-19 security and assessment of Covid age scores.
- Faculty Academic Ethics Committees (FAEC), supported by the Research Ethics Officers halted all face-to-face data collection from 18th March, ahead of the beginning of the UK lockdown.
- Researchers have been supported to conduct their research using alternative methods where appropriate, including using online data collection methods such as MS Teams or online surveys. Guidance on research data management whilst working from home was also provided.
- Changes were made to the ethics process in order to fast-track approval for amendments to applications (that had previously received approval) provided that they were within pre-determined parameters. This allowed for a quicker transition from face-to-face to online research. Those that did not fit within the parameters received normal scrutiny. These changes were implemented by FAEC in the following Faculties: Business, Law and Social Sciences (BLSS); Computing, Engineering and the Build Environment (CEBE); and Health, Education and Life Sciences (HELS).

5. Research Misconduct

The University takes seriously any allegation of research misconduct, and this year a new Research Misconduct Policy was approved. This policy integrates existing mechanisms for investigating research misconduct for staff and students and provides assurances that the processes in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair.

5.1 Formal investigations of research misconduct and lessons learned

There have been no formal investigations of research misconduct in academic year 2019-20 undertaken by the deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julian Beer.

5.2. How BCU creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

BCU is committed to fostering a supportive research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of research misconduct. In 2019/2020 BCU has worked towards this by raising awareness of good research conduct (see [Actions and activities](#)) and through creating the Research Misconduct Policy:

- The Policy clearly sets out the procedures for reporting allegations of research misconduct, the stages of investigating allegations, possible outcomes of investigations and the appeals process. The policy also provides examples of research misconduct and steps that can be taken should an individual be unsure whether a suspected incident falls within the definition of research misconduct.
- The Research Misconduct Policy states that the University “will make careful efforts to protect the positions and reputations of those persons who, in good faith, make allegations.” In addition, “the University will ensure that those making an allegation in good faith or co-operating in an assessment or investigation into an allegation of misconduct will not be retaliated against in their employment or enrolment at BCU. The complainant shall have an opportunity to present evidence before the investigation and disciplinary panel, to be informed of the results of the investigation, and to be protected from victimisation. The University will take action against individuals who victimise complainants”.
- The University is also committed to ensuring that false allegations are also dealt with appropriately: “where the outcome of a preliminary review, disciplinary hearing or appeal stage indicates that an allegation has not been made in good faith, the University may pursue disciplinary action against an internal complainant and action as appropriate against an external complainant.”

Further work will be done over the next year to improve training around research integrity issues, which in turn we hope will encourage open discussions about questionable research practices and research misconduct across all areas of research in the University.

6. Preparation of this Annual Statement

This Annual Statement was prepared by the Research Integrity Officers and approved by Professor Julian Beer, Deputy-Vice Chancellor for Research, on 23-October-2020.